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ABSTRACT

Once an actor or actress has gained experience with basic stage movement and speech, convincing character portrayal may be the next skill to be developed. This package is designed to provide a deeper understanding of character development through careful reading, research, thought, and experimentation. The two related lessons--from research to monologue and putting your character back in the play--outline, in detail, purposes, performance objectives, instructions, activities, and postevaluations. (JM)

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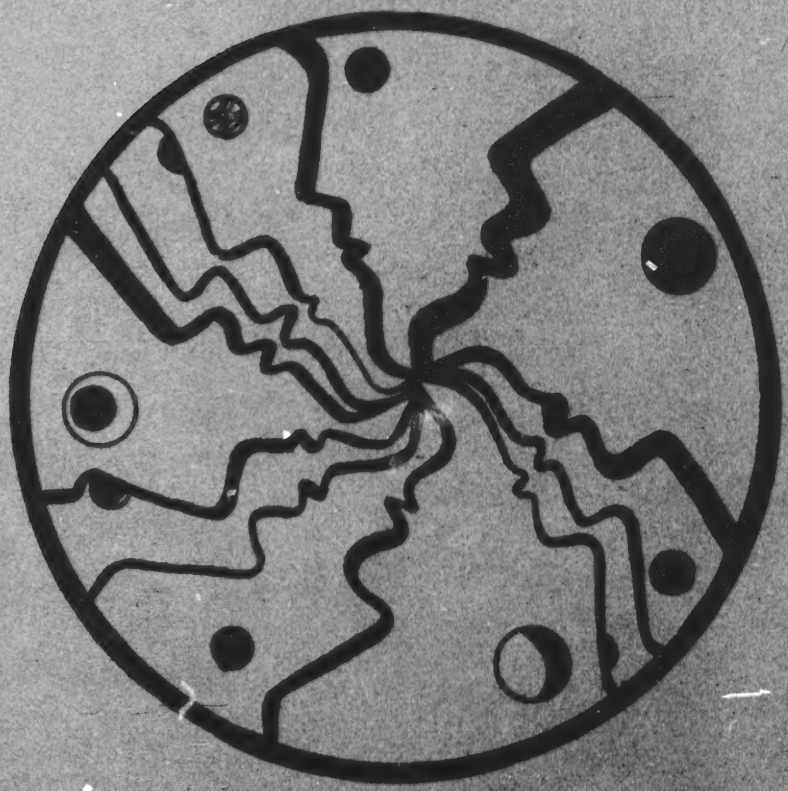
DEVELOPING A CHARACTER IN DEPTH

TAP* 220



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CS 201 499

DEVELOPING A CHARACTER IN DEPTH

INTRODUCTION:

Once an actor or actress has gained some experience with basic stage movement and the transformation of words on a page to movement and speech on a stage, the next skill he or she may want to develop could be how to make the portrayal of a character more convincing. A deeper understanding of CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT is achieved through careful reading, research, thought, and experimentation.

PRE-EVALUATION:

1. The purpose of a pre-evaluation is to help the learner discover how much he already knows and how much he needs to learn. If he can complete the pre-evaluation with ease, then perhaps he should try a different learning package. However, the learner should not be discouraged if he finds the pre-evaluation difficult; that merely indicates that the package probably contains information he can profit from.

2. This package is designed as one possible option an actor might choose after completing TAP 212 or TAP 213. If you found either of those packages instructive and useful, you probably are ready for this package and might skip the pre-evaluation and go right to Lesson One.

3. If you've had some experience performing in one-act or three-act plays, you may find you have already developed some of the skills taught in these lessons. Skim them to see if this is so. If you believe the activities are too elementary or too easy for you, do the exercise provided below and show your work to your instructor.

EXERCISE

Choose a character whom you have recently (the last year or two) portrayed in a play performance. Write a brief "autobiography" for that character noting important dates and special events in his life from when he was born up to the time the play takes place. Be prepared to tell your instructor about special pieces of "business" you invented to add an appropriate individuality to your portrayal of that character.

If the activities in the lessons and/or the above exercise seem in any way challenging, continue below with Lesson One of this package.

LESSON ONE: From Research to Monologue

PURPOSE:

The first steps to effective interpretation of character involve careful reading, intelligent guess work, and an active use of one's imagination. One effective way of consolidating and internalizing the information gathered in this manner is through the development and presentation of a monologue "in character."

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

The learner will write and deliver an informal monologue as a character from a play of his choosing. The monologue will suggest or provide some background information about the character. It will be delivered with some of the physical and vocal mannerisms or characteristics that an actor playing the role might use in his portrayal.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. The activities in this lesson can and probably should be done by a single individual. However, the next lesson may best be completed with several actors working together. Before you make too many decisions, read Instruction #1 and Activity #1 of Lesson Two. Perhaps you and one or two other actors will want to work together in the selection of a scene to perform--one in which each of you can play a different character. You would still do this lesson individually, but you would have pre-arranged co-workers to help you complete the second phase of this packet.

2. Select a play that you have seen or read in the past and liked.
   or
   Work cooperatively in selecting a play with one or two fellow actors.

3. Locate a full script of the play you have selected and read it thoroughly.

4. Select a character from that play whom you would enjoy portraying on stage. The character you select need not be the "lead." Less important characters and even "bit" parts should provide an equally challenging--if not more challenging--situation. If you choose a play cooperatively with one or two fellow actors you must be sure that there are scenes in the play during which your respective characters are on stage together.

5. Do Activities 1-5 below.

6. Do one or more of Activities 6 through 11.

7. Complete this lesson by doing Activity 12. The term monologue is defined in Activity 12.

8. Complete the self-evaluation and go on to Lesson Two of this packet.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Before you can analyze a single character in a play you need to establish some facts about the play in general. Many texts suggests ways of analyzing a play. Basic Drama Projects (available in the Drama Resource Area) is one such text and you may wish to read pages 113 and 114. On page 117 Basic Drama Projects also provides a bibliography for further reading.

   The most essential information you need to determine about the play, though, is its central conflict. That can usually be established by asking three questions. Fill in the blank spaces below with information about the play you have chosen.

   a. Who is the main character in the play?

   _____

   What is it that the main character wants?

   b. In plays the characters always want something. In _____

   _____(the play you have chosen) the main character

   wants to _____.

   c. What is it that keeps the character from just going and getting what he wants? What is the obstacle?_____

   _____.

   If you are sure your answers above are clear and accurate, go right on to Activity 2. If you're not sure check with your instructor or look in the Drama Resource Area for a play catalogue which lists the play you have chosen and read the brief synopsis given there; it will probably provide answers to the above questions.

2. If the character you have chosen to study and portray is not the main character you identified in Activity 1 you must now ask some further questions:

   What is the relationship of the character you have chosen to the main character? Is he most often in conflict with or in harmony with the main character?

   Check one: ___ conflict ___ harmony
   ___ He never interacts with the main character.
   What, then, is your character's major function in the play?

   Check one:
   ___ He intensifies or adds to the obstacle the main character is trying to overcome.
   ___ He aids the main character in overcoming the obstacle.
   ___ Other:_____

   _____

Next, whether the character you have chosen to portray is the main character or a supporting one, consider how he relates to three or four other characters in the play and write a brief sketch of the relationship in the spaces provided below. A sample sketch is given to illustrate how you might fill in the blanks.

Your character: Maria 1
Other character: Herman 2
relationship by status: 1 is 2's servant
relationship in feeling or action: secretly in love with him
Second character: William 3
relationship by status: 1 is 3's wife
relationship in feeling or action: always arguing
Third character: Sarah 4
relationship by status: 1 is 4's older sister
relationship in feeling or action: confidant
etc.

Your character:_____ 1

Other character:_____ 2
relationship by status: 1 is 2's_____
relationship in feeling or action:_____
_____

Second character:_____ 3
relationship by status: 1 is 3's_____
relationship in feeling or action:_____
_____

Third character:_____4
relationship by status: 1 is 4's_____
relationship in feeling or action:_____
_____

Fourth character:_____5
relationship by status: 1 is 5's_____
relationship in feeling or action:_____
_____

3. After completing Activity 1 and 2 you should be able to write a brief statistical description of your character including:

a. age_____
b. probable birthplace_____
c. happy or unhappy childhood?_____
d. probable amount of schooling_____
e. high or low native intelligence?_____
f. occupation or work experience_____
g. economic status:
upper, middle, or lower class?_____

Fill in these blanks. Obviously, if no specific information concerning these areas appears in the script, you will have to invent some that would seem to fit the character.

4. As in the above activity you should be able to note or imagine what your character looks like physically:

   h. height_____
   i. weight (build)_____
   j. posture_____
   k. color of hair_____
   l. complection_____
   m. physical attractiveness_____

   Again, you are free to invent any details that are not strictly specified by the script.

   n. Perhaps you would like to add some additional distinguishing physical characteristic that would seem to fit your character (eg. a large nose, a beard, a pot belly)_____

5. In a manner of speaking Activities 3 and 4 have helped you develop a knowledge of your character from "A" to "N." This activity will help you build on that knowledge from "O" to "Z."

   The list below explores more of what goes on <u>inside</u> the character, and it may help if you start thinking of yourself as being the character. This will give you (the character) the freedom to answer questions which don't have any set answers. And it will also make you begin thinking in a way that is necessary when it comes to writing a monologue (see Activity #).

   o. What nicknames do others have for you? Or do you have for yourself? Which nicknames do you like? Dislike?

   p. What pets, if any, do you own or would you own if you could? Their names?

   q. What hobbies do you or did you have?

   r. How do you feel about the work you do most of the day? A job, housework, school. Do you like it? Do you enter into it eagerly? or what?

   s. Describe briefly the house or apartment you live in. Let how you feel about this place become a part of your description through the adjectives you choose. For example: "I live in a drab, dirty little apartment on the wrong side of the tracks." or "My house always reminds me of sunshine; the kitchen is a bright yellow...etc."

t. Who are the people or what are the things you feel closest to in this world?

u. What is one of the happiest things you remember about your past?

v. What is one of your saddest or most unpleasant memories?

w. What are some of your responsibilities in this world? To yourself or others? How do you feel about these responsibilities?

x. Do you view yourself as a "winner" or "loser"? What is your outlook on life in general?

y. What do you dream about?

z. What kind of future do you see for yourself?

If you have difficulty in coming up with some answers to the above questions, you may find it helpful to skip ahead to the following activities. They are designed to stimulate your thinking about your character just one step more before you write the monologue required by Activity 12. However, they may also provide you with ideas to fill in blanks above or add to some of the original answers you jotted down.

6. Improvise two or more of the following "scenes" as the character you have chosen would do them:

a. Wake up, get up, get yourself dressed, brush your teeth as the character you have chosen would.

b. Write out the following letter, seal it in an envelope, and then improvise your coming home (that is, your character coming home), discovering the letter, opening it, reading it, and reacting to it.

Dear Customer:

Our records indicate that yesterday three of your checks had to be returned for insufficient funds. We trust you will take care of this matter immediately, and in the meantime we are charging your account $15, five dollars for each returned check.

Sincerely yours,
Jonathan Brown
Bank Manager

c. Improvise a phone conversation with a salesman who is trying to get you to buy various household items (brooms, tablecloths, etc.) that have been made by blind or handicapped workers. Leave pauses for the "sales talk" on the other end of the conversation but react "in character" both physically and vocally on your end of the line.

d. Improvise a very intense moment in your (that is, your character's) life.

7. By now you've probably begun to develop a fairly complete mental "picture" of the character you have chosen. What kind of adjectives might you use in describing him? Is he devilishly charming, cunning, humanitarian, or what? Has he a sense of humor, or is he humorless? Is he friendly or aloof? Superficial or intense?
Write a brief description of your character--the kind that often appears at the beginning of a script or when the character first appears in the script.

Next, decide what your character would do in one of the following situations:

a. He has just inherited a million dollars or won an important award.

b. He is alone and lost in the Sarhara Desert with only three days supply of food and water.

c. He is in a position of leadership and has just learned of a plot to destroy the world or to assassinate a fellow leader.

d. His/her spouse has just stormed out of the house suitcase in hand. The three (6? 12?) children are in the next room, hungry and screaming.

Do a brief enactment of one of these scenes for a friend or your instructor either alone or with the help of a fellow student. See if, without prompting, your "audience" will describe the character you portrayed with some of the same or similar adjectives as you used in your description above. Ask the viewer to fill in the blanks of the following sentences.

I observed _____ doing an improvisation of a character who

has (describe situation)_____.
I believe he/she was trying to portray a person who is (supply adjectives)

_____.

Signed:_____

Date:_____

8. Check out a copy of Basic Drama Projects from the Drama Resource Area and read Chapters 17 and 18, pp. 105-121. Those chapters discuss many of the same concepts you have explored in this package, but the point of view and emphasis is different enough to make your reading worthwhile. Examine, particularly, the Activity Sheets on pages 111, 12 and 119, 20 for some additional questions you might ask about your character.

9. Draw a sketch (full length or head and torso) of your character as you see him or her in your imagination. Show your drawing to a friend or your instructor and explain what characteristics you feel the drawing reveals about the person.

10. Make an abstract "portrait" of your character. First answer the following questions:

a. If your character were a color, what color would he be?_____

b. If he were an animal, what animal would he be?_____

c. If he were a musical instrument, what instrument would he be?_____

d. If he were a food, what food would he be?_____

e. What texture of cloth?_____

f. What season of the year?_____

g. What mode of transportation?_____

h. What flower?_____

Then, make a collage (from photographs, pieces of cloth, colored paper, and other print material) which you feel captures the essence of your character (You don't have to include all the objects and elements listed above.) Show the collage to a friend or your instructor and explain how the different elements help create an abstract "portrait" of your character.

11. If you have skill or background in applying make-up, you may wish to do a make-up plot for your character and experiment by actually making up for the part prior to doing your final presentation in Lesson Two. It would be an additional help, of course, if you would plan for and seek out an appropriate costume as well. Giving serious thought to make up and costume often helps an actor develop insight concerning the character he portrays.

12. As a final activity in this lesson you are to write a monologue for your character. If you are unsure of what a monologue is, read the definition and explanation on the following page. This is to be your creation, not a monologue from the play.

    You (that is, your character) may be remembering an event in your past, commenting at length on a present situation, or dreaming about the future. Whether you are talking to another character or the audience or yourself is up to you.

    You will be performing this monologue, in character, before an audience whom you will have chosen. The performance is to be two or three minutes in length and it is recommended, but not required, that you memorize the speech. If you wish, you may use one prop or piece of a costume (hat, apron, etc.) as an aid to developing your character. However, your main tools in this exercise are your body and your voice. Your job will be to make your audience really believe in your character. There will be a question and answer period following the monologue when the audience gets a chance to interview the character (that is, you in character). See the post-evaluation.

A DEFINITION OF MONOLOGUE

The prefix mono-- in the word monologue means one. A monologue is a portion of a scene in which only one person speaks. That person may be alone on stage--speaking to himself or the audience--or there may be other characters present to whom he is delivering his speech.

When only one person on stage is speaking for an extended length of time, a scene runs the risk of becoming static and less interesting, so an author usually has an important reason for including a monologue in his play. Therefore, most monologues are key speeches, and the characters delivering them often reveal a great deal about themselves: memories that are important to them; hopes or dreams they have; fears, loves, emotions that control their actions; and/or thoughts that explain past or future behavior.

For some examples of monologues locate a copy of Six Great Modern Plays in the Drama Resource Area and turn to page 387. The long speech by Chris is a monologue. In it he is remembering an incident in his past and describing some of his past and present feelings to another character who is present on stage. In another play on page 446 the character Amanda has a monologue in which she describes to her daughter something that occurred earlier in the day. The incident is important to the story, but rather than dramatize the incident itself, the author has Amanda describe it because Amanda's feelings about the incident are even more important than the incident. In the same play on pages 438 and 439 another character, Tom, alone on stage, delivers a monologue directly to the audience. Though there are no clear-cut examples in this book of a monologue in which the character is thinking out loud and talking to himself, Amanda's speech on page 477 comes close. She is supposedly talking to Laura, but the author wants the audience to realize that Amanda is actually off by herself in a dream remembering a pleasant past experience.

POST-EVALUATION:

1. The major portion of your post-evaluation will consist of the presentation *of the monologue you wrote for Activity 12* to an audience of four or more people. You choose who will be in your audience; you may include or exclude your instructor.

2. There is to be a question and answer period following your presentation—sort of a "press conference" where members of the audience get to interview your character. And you are to respond to their questions in character.

   Provide your audience with some sample questions to get the session started. They should make up their own questions in addition.

   SAMPLE QUESTIONS

   a. What do you eat for breakfast? or Show us how you sit down and eat breakfast.
   b. How do you hold your coffee (or tea) cup?
   c. How do you walk across a room to open a window?
   d. What do you remember most about going to school?
   e. How do you feel about women competing with and receiving salaries equal to men in the business world?
   f. Show us how you would say good-bye to your mother over the phone.

3. Based on the questions asked and the comments you received when you presented your monologue, fill in the blanks in the following sentences:

   I feel my monologue was _____ successful. (highly, fairly, not very)

   I think the time I spent on preparing the monologue was _____. (worthwhile, wasted, partly worthwhile)

   The aspect of the character I was portraying that seemed most clear to my audience was _____.

   The aspect that seemed least clear was _____

   _____.

4. You were instructed to do one or more of the Activities numbered 6 through 11. Which one(s) did you do?_____

5. Once you have completed this post-evaluation, go right on to Lesson Two. At the end of Lesson Two you will be asked to confer with your instructor who will then review your work on both lessons.

LESSON TWO: PUTTING YOUR CHARACTER BACK IN THE PLAY

PURPOSE:

Whereas Lesson One asks you to extract your character from the play and look at him or her from all sides, this lesson asks you to take what you've learned about your character and apply that knowledge to an interpretation and portrayal of that character in a short scene.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:

The learner will perform a 3 to 5 minute segment of the play the character he has been studying comes from. The segment should in some way feature the character being studied and provide the learner an opportunity to develop his interpretation of that character. Afterwards the learner will be able to identify at least five movements, expressions, or pieces of physical or vocal business in his performance that can be related to information he noted down or activities he completed in Lesson One of this package.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Review the play you originally chose concentrating on the scenes which involve the character you have been studying. Select one of those scenes to perform before an audience or videotape camera. In most cases the scene you choose will involve other characters as well, but your character should have a featured role or function. The different activities listed below suggest different ways you might "cast" the other characters. If you choose Activity #1, however, you will have to choose your scene with special care so that two or three actors can fulfill the performance objective simultaneously.

2. Do any <u>one</u> of the Activities in this lesson. See your instructor if you need technical assistance or one or two volunteer helpers or readers. Your instructor will aid you in locating these helpers.

3. When you feel you are ready to present your scene or when (in Activity #4) you have completed videotaping the scene, arrange a "show time" with your instructor and choose or invite an audience to attend.

4. Complete the post-evaluation and packet evaluation at the end of this lesson.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Choose a scene in cooperation with one or two other actors. Your decision to work cooperatively and your choice of scene should probably be made <u>before you even begin the Activities in Lesson One of this packet</u>. Then, though you will be working independently at first, you will know that, when it comes to doing this scene, someone else (or two others) will be available for you to work with in presenting a polished and thoroughly developed scene that allows all participants to demonstrate their skill in character development.

2. Do the scene you have chosen as a monologue. This may be accomplished in one of two ways:
   A. Choose a segment of the play that is very close to being a monologue anyhow. Pause appropriately for any "responses" or "interjections" by other characters, and then continue on as if they had been spoken.
   B. Record or have a friend record the various responses and interjections on tape and have a technician, with script in hand, cue in other characters' speeches.

3. Choose a scene in which other characters on stage have little to say and little need to move. Then find some volunteer readers who, with script in hand, will play the other necessary roles in your scene.

4. Do the same thing that is outlined in Activity 3 but videotape the scene rather than perform it "live." That way the camera can focus in on you or show close ups of the other characters so that the viewers who eventually see the final product will be unaware that anyone is reading from a script.

POST-EVALUATION:

1. Your post evaluation will consist mainly of your performing (or replaying a videotape of your performance of) the scene you have chosen which features the character you have been studying. Arrange an appropriate time with your instructor and invite an audience.

2. Following your performance encourage members of your audience to tell you (without any prompting or leading questions from you) what kind of person they perceived the character you were portraying to be. If your audience uses some of the same kinds of words to describe your character as you did in completing Lesson One of this packet, that will be a good sign that you have been successful in your portrayal.

3. Complete the following sentences.
   A. In Lesson One I said my character was _____
   In the scene I acted I suggested this trait when _____
   _____.
   B. In Lesson One I also said my character was _____
   In the scene I acted I suggested this trait when _____
   _____.
   C. A third character trait I noted in Lesson One was _____
   In the scene I acted I suggested this trait when _____
   _____.
   D. A fourth character trait I noted in Lesson One was _____
   In the scene I acted I suggested this trait when _____
   _____.

E. A fifth character trait I noted in Lesson One was _____
In the scene I acted I suggested this trait when _____

_____.

4. Gather together all the pages of this packet, check to see that you have completed all the necessary blanks in exercises like the one directly above, complete the packet evaluation on the following page, and arrange a final meeting with your instructor so that, together, you may critique your work on this entire packet.

REVIEW OF PACKAGE TITLED DEVELOPING A CHARACTER IN DEPTH

INSTRUCTIONS:

Please complete the following statements and then place this sheet in the box of your instructor. Your opinion will be appreciated, so do not ask a friend for help. It is not required that you sign this review.

1. I anticipated this package would take me _____ school days to complete.

2. The actual time it took me was _____ school days.

   I would explain the difference between the estimated and actual time it took me as follows:

3. Of the activities I did I felt the most difficult was:

   The most useless was:

4. Some problems I had while completing this package were as follows:

5. I would recommend the following changes in the wording or requirements of the lessons:

6. I would rate this package (circle one):

No Good	Some Good	OK	Good	Very Good

(Optional) Signed:_____